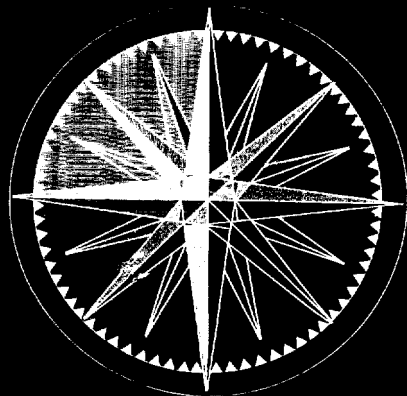


SECRET



Release 2005/01/27 : CIA-RDP79-00927A005000060002-1

17 September 1965

OCI No. 0307/65A

Copy No. 52

SPECIAL REPORT

NASIR'S POLITICAL DILEMMA:
HOW TO FOSTER DEMOCRACY IN A TOTALITARIAN ENVIRONMENT

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

25X1

SECRET

Approved For Release 2005/01/27 : CIA-RDP79-00927A005000060002-1
Excluded from automatic
downgrading and declassification

25X1

Approved For Release 2005/01/27 : CIA-RDP79-00927A005000060002-1

Approved For Release 2005/01/27 : CIA-RDP79-00927A005000060002-1

SECRET

**NASIR'S POLITICAL DILEMMA:
HOW TO FOSTER DEMOCRACY IN A TOTALITARIAN ENVIRONMENT**

Egypt's President Gamal Abdal Nasir is engaged in his third attempt to establish a mass political organization that would act to achieve his policies. Although he enjoys immense personal popularity, Nasir wants to secure wider popular participation in the realization of his revolution's stated goals: socialism and democracy. Now 13 years in power, his military regime has no assurance of continuity after his death. His latest political instrument, the Arab Socialist Union, has a stronger mass base than its two predecessors, but will be no more capable of serving the desired purpose unless Nasir relaxes his tight control.

Justification for Dictatorship

When Nasir's Free Officer's clique seized power in 1952 it had no formal plan for use of that power. Its inner circle, the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), included in its program "the conscription, or mobilization, of national sentiment." Nasir spoke of his desire for a democratic, socialist, and co-operative society, making it clear that he intended to apply his own definitions to these words.

It is evident that Nasir did not at first intend to deprive Egyptians of their political freedom, although he knew that internal corruption had to be uprooted. Initially he envisioned a general purification, after which the existing political groupings could continue to help govern Egypt. A short experience with the spectacle of the parties scrambling for power while making gestures at "purification" convinced him of the need to eliminate cleavages and conflict which

were fostering violence and self-interest rather than cooperation and unity.

The Liberation Rally

Primarily in an effort to forestall agitation by the existing parties, Nasir concocted the Liberation Rally in 1953. He claimed that it provided a means "to organize popular strength for the reconstruction of society on a sound new basis."

In fact, however, the Liberation Rally was an instrument of regimentation, through which the RCC could purge labor organizations and suppress volatile groups. It proved its worth when it organized student and trade union demonstrations against the return of constitutional government and civil freedom. Within three years political opposition was crushed.

Nasir continued to deplore the lack of a social philosophy, ideology, and sense of public responsibility among Egyptians.

SECRET

SECRET

However, the Liberation Rally could not be converted to stimulate the kind of political expression he sought, so he dropped the organization and renewed his search for a "mass apparatus" to support the revolution.

The National Union

In 1956 Nasir organized the National Union to answer his problem. It was to perform two tasks. It was to be a "school" in which a new generation could absorb a revolutionary mentality and develop a homogeneous, Nasir-designed political culture. Secondly, in more practical terms, it was the state party through which promising candidates for the National Assembly could be selected and potentially dangerous ones eliminated.

Here again, the emphasis was on control. Candidates had to be approved by the National Union's Executive Committee, which was composed of men drawn from the regime's top leadership. The deposit required for filing candidacy, \$140, was about twice the average Egyptians' annual income. Thus the common man, on whom Nasir was supposedly building Egypt's future, was nearly shut out. In the 1957 elections, labor won only three percent of the seats, and the fellahin--the peasants--less than one percent.

Indeed, Nasir had set the tone when the National Union was formed by proclaiming that Egypt needed a period of political, economic, and social regimentation to achieve the necessary condi-

tions for "true" democracy, social and economic equality, higher production, and higher living standards. The National Union was in effect stillborn. Nasir recognized this, and its close identification with the Egyptian-Syrian union allowed for its quiet burial when Syria withdrew from the United Arab Republic in 1961.

Arab Socialist Union

As Nasir groped anew for some device that would meet his political needs, he concluded that even if he was unready to grant the Egyptian people any power, he could provide a coherent political philosophy that would attract them. Something resembling a systematic thought formulation emerged in the National Charter of 1962. It was proclaimed as "the political theory of our Revolution and the revolutionary ideology for the application of our socialism." It pulled together the thinking which had evolved during the years of Nasir's rule, rather than providing anything new.

With the charter issued, Nasir was ready to form a new state party to educate the people and stimulate their participation in public affairs. The Arab Socialist Union (ASU), established in December 1962 was specifically dedicated to pursuing the goals defined in the National Charter.

The ASU is more carefully designed than its predecessors to secure popular participation. Membership is open to all

SECRET

SECRET

Egyptians above the age of 18 who are "good unexploiting citizens" inspired by faith in the National Charter. The tiers of the ASU's organizational pyramid start with 6,000-7,000 basic units. At least 50 percent representation at all levels is granted to the workers and farmers. At the top is a General National Congress, which on occasion doubles as the Egyptian legislature, the National Assembly. On the surface the ASU would seem to provide a reasonable vehicle through which the Egyptian people could actively participate in political affairs and express their will. It has a membership of 5 million or 15 percent of Egypt's total population.

Regime controls over the ASU, however, are just as rigid as they had been over its predecessors. They are exerted through the National Congress' Higher Executive Committee--in theory elected by the congress from among its own members, but in practice appointed by Nasir. ASU statutes give this committee the right "to amend or cancel any decision taken by the formations of the ASU at a lower level, should such decisions not meet ASU objectives, goals, or policy." The Higher Executive Committee also can "dissolve any ASU organ if it fails to perform the duties entrusted in a satisfactory manner."

Even at the lowest level, Nasir is taking no chances. Many of the basic units are formed out of other organiza-

tions, such as farmers' and workers' groups, which themselves are controlled by the government. These units are pointedly assigned the responsibility for "counteracting deviation, promoting socialist principles, and contributing toward the solution of problems by cooperating with higher levels of the ASU."

Still hesitant to trust his ASU, Nasir has nevertheless expended great efforts to foster its growth. He has spent many hours with its committees and parliamentary bodies, answering questions, listening to suggestions, exhorting the members to greater revolutionary fervor. "Ideological institutes" have been established to improve the process of "bringing the revolution" to rural areas. Promising young individuals from basic units are being trained in the policies of the regime and in techniques for explaining them to the uneducated rural population after they return to village life to propagate the faith.

Recently an ASU Socialist Studies Institute was opened, in which Nasir and other high-ranking Egyptian officials will help teach such courses as "Political Revolution and the Process of Economic Development" and "Leadership Training--Skills for Political Cadres." Nasir has even proposed--probably for dramatic effect--that he resign as President of Egypt in order to devote all his time and energies to the ASU.

SECRET

SECRET

25X6

But despite all plans, efforts, fanfare, and speeches, Nasir admits that the Arab Socialist Union has not achieved its purposes. Its members join only because it is the thing to do, a form of insurance against discrimination. Most are apathetic, indifferent, and cynical. Nasir complains that the ASU lacks leaders, that it has utterly failed to reach the people. He has gone so far as to invite Egypt's Communists to join his party, hoping that their reputed skills at organization and recruitment will inject new life into the moribund ASU. Although the Communists, themselves disorganized and ineffective, have little capability to help, even if they wish to, some have joined, and their presence has alarmed many Egyptians.

Other Factors

The ASU's failure to engender the spontaneous support Nasir seeks stems from the same basic facts of Egyptian life on which his previous efforts foundered. Centuries of foreign domination or occupation have left the Egyptian masses politically inert, apathetic, and suspicious of government in any form. Like the other Arab states, Egypt has been unable to shake the strong allegiance of the people to the family, the tribe, and the religious community. The Egyptian peasant continues to scratch out a meager existence, and has little time or inclination to involve himself in anything else.

Egypt's 70 percent rate of illiteracy is another barrier to Nasir's plans. The regime is working hard to provide free education through university level for all qualified students, and in the meantime depends on an intensive dissemination of information by radio. It is common to see peasants listening to their transistor radios while working in the fields.

Nasir's popularity seems to work both for and against his purposes. The poor Egyptian tends to idolize him, and to dissociate him from the hated instrument of the tax-collecting government. On the other hand, however, the Egyptians expect the hero-leader to perform the necessary miracles, and so do not yet feel compelled to involve themselves in seeking solutions.

Probably the strongest single factor tending to help overcome mass political apathy is Nasir's army. For the first time in modern history Egypt has an entirely indigenous army in which it can take pride. Only a few

25X6

SECRET

SECRET

years ago young men abhorred army service as menial, dirty, and beneath their dignity. Now military service is accepted as a national duty, a normal part of life. The army attempts to educate its inductees in political and other nonmilitary matters. It is trying to inculcate in its 20,000 draftees a year a knowledge of the problems of Egypt and of Nasir's goals, and a desire to serve the country after returning to civilian occupations.

The results of this effort remain to be seen. The tens of thousands who served in Yemen may be more disenchanted with policies leading to years of

futile warfare than impressed with the glories of working for Nasir's revolution.

Outlook

Nasir has gradually established governmental control over almost every aspect of Egyptian life. The pervasiveness of that control, as in the Arab Socialist Union, would seem to undermine his hopes to bring a democratic, socialist society to Egypt. Unless he relaxes some of his controls, the ASU or any successor organization will remain an instrument for totalitarian rule, and his professed aims will remain mere slogans.

25X1

* * *

SECRET

Approved For Release 2005/01/27 : CIA-RDP79-00927A005000060002-1

SECRET

SECRET

Approved For Release 2005/01/27 : CIA-RDP79-00927A005000060002-1